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DEPARTMENT FOR IO/MPR

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SUBJECT: UNGA: FIFTH COMMITTEE DISCUSSES ICT GOVERNANCE,
SYSTEM UPGRADES AND DISASTER RECOVERY PROVISIONS

¶1. Summary: In a formal session on October 22 of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary), Secretariat officials and delegations discussed a number of reports on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) reform, ICT governance and disaster preparedness. Delegations agreed that the existing Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) is outdated and should be replaced, but diverged on funding requirements. Wary of the risks of such an extensive project, some counseled drawing lessons from the last major ICT upgrade. Headquarters and field elements will divide ICT responsibilities. On disaster preparedness, Member States were caught off guard by the decision to forego the previously proposed ICT back-up site in the New York City area. End Summary.

¶2. The Under Secretary-General (USYG) for Management Angela Kane introduced the Secretary-General's (SYG's) reports on Investing in Information and Communications Technology (A/62/793 and A/62/793/Add.1); ICT Security, Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity (A/62/477); and Enterprise Systems (A/62/510/Rev.1). Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) Susan McLurg then presented a separate report on ICT (A/63/487). Delegates also heard from Chief Information Technology Officer (CITO) Choi Soon-hong. Kenneth Herman, Senior Advisor on Information Management Policy Coordination of the Secretariat of the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination, also introduced the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit, Knowledge Management (JIU/REP/2007/6) and A Common Payroll for UN System Organizations (JIU/REP/2005/4). These reports were followed by interventions by representatives of France (speaking for the EU), Antigua and Barbuda (speaking for the G77 and China), Canada (speaking for CANZ), Switzerland (also speaking for Liechtenstein), Singapore, South Korea, the United States (see paragraph 9), Russia, and Japan. Statements available in full text have been sent to IO/MPR via e-mail.

¶3. The SYG's reports outlined the need to improve ICT management and noted that the absence of an integrated information system is seriously hampering the UN's effectiveness. Kane proposed management oversight, advisory bodies, strengthening the CITO, replacement of the aging IMIS and ancillary systems with a commercially available Enterprise Resource Planning system (ERP). The CITO will be responsible for strategic and System-wide functions, while the Department of Field Support (DFS) is to retain day-to-day control of communications systems in peacekeeping missions. The SYG is requesting UNGA approval for these improvements.

¶4. Speakers generally agreed that IMIS must go. Antigua and Barbuda cited the risks to which the UN is exposed by using fragmented ICT systems. South Korea (ROK) expressed hope for timely development of a new ICT structure. The Swiss representative called current ICT platforms "not only outdated, but also incompatible with each other, even within the same agency or within the Secretariat."

¶15. Paying for the new system will not be so simple. The SYG's report claims that the ERP proposal can be funded at USD 280 million over five years. While ROK welcomed the budget-neutral proposal to enhance the CITO's office by drawing on the existing Secretariat resources, others were skeptical. Antigua and Barbuda prognosticated a total cost exceeding USD 372 million that would be robbed from other programs. "Expressions of support without the underlying funding run the risk of being an empty promise." Contrary to the others, Switzerland encouraged investing more, stating that it would be unwise for the UNGA to exercise "disproportionate budgetary restraint" that would save money only in the short run.

¶16. Other delegations expressed concern about possible ballooning costs and risks of replacing IMIS with ERP. The Japanese representative encouraged initial approval of "only the minimum necessary for the design phase," to be followed next year by "a more streamlined cost estimate". He also inquired about the possibilities of delays and cost overruns. Antigua and Barbuda and the ROK urged the Secretariat to use lessons already learned in building IMIS and the trial-and-error experiences of other international organizations in implementing an ERP, e.g. UNICEF, UNDP, UNHR and WFP.

¶18. USYG Kane withdrew the proposal for a data back-up center in Long Island City, New York. The ACABQ Chair called on the Secretariat to explain why they are no longer requesting the facility and recommended that the SYG submit a new proposal for a secondary data center.

¶19. United States representative noted, "Given the difficult

economic conditions we are operating under and the rapidly escalating expenses we are facing both under the regular and peacekeeping budgets, we must ensure that the resources we provide are used in an efficient, effective and transparent manner." Full U.S. delegation remarks are available at the Mission's web site, www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov.
Khalilzad